



To: AAO Australian User Community
From: AAO Director
Date: 25 July 2006 (revised 7 Dec 2006)
Subject: Travel & Accommodation support for Australian observers

1 BACKGROUND

One of the issues that emerged clearly from the recent DEST review of the AAO was the barrier to full exploitation of the AAT that travel and subsistence costs pose for Australian astronomers and students. The AAO has therefore undertaken to support basic travel and accommodation (T&A) costs for Australian observers, starting from semester 06B. This measure brings support for Australian observers into line with support for UK observers, who have their travel expenses paid by PPARC. The following sections outline the proposed level of this support and the proposed procedures for payment.

2 FRAMEWORK

For each run involving Australian observers (people based at Australian institutions, excluding the AAO), the AAO will pay one astronomer and one student (at most) a fixed amount for travel (based on the cheapest mode of transport from their home institution) and SSO Lodge costs (for the length of the run plus one night). This support is intended to cover the bulk of the costs associated with taking up observing time, without imposing an unnecessary administrative burden on either the users or the AAO.

3 DETAILED RULES FOR T&A

- [1] *Eligible observers*: For Australian observers (observers based at Australian institutions), T&A will be provided for up to one astronomer and one student per observing run. T&A will not normally be provided for two astronomers at a time, but may be provided in exceptional cases for two students (no astronomer) with explicit prior permission from the Director. At the discretion of the Director, T&A for up to 3 observers may be provided in the special case of Large Observing Programs when no AAO support astronomer is supplied. [*Astronomer* generally means a staff member or postdoc at a recognized astronomical institution with a minimum level of observing experience, who can competently carry out an observing run after an initial night with a support astronomer. *Student* generally means a graduate student or senior undergraduate from a recognized astronomical institution.]
- [2] *Observing runs*: An observing run is usually a single block of time allocated to a particular program. Where a program is allocated separate, non-contiguous blocks of time, these are considered separate observing runs. Where a single observing run extends for more than one week, it may (for the purposes of T&A support) effectively be treated as

N separate runs, where $N = 1 + \text{int}((\text{length of run in nights} - 1) / 7)$; how these N runs split the observing period is left to the observers.

- [3] *Travel support:* For each observing run (see [2]), travel support will be provided for each eligible observer (see [1]) as a fixed payment based on the location of the observer's institution. Travel payments are approximately based on the cheapest mode of transport between the observer's institution and the AAT: for institutions in NSW, ACT, VIC and southern QLD, travel by car is assumed; for institutions in northern QLD, TAS, SA, WA or NT, travel by plane is assumed. Where there are two observers attending a run from the same institution and car travel is assumed, only one travel payment will be made. The travel payments for observers from various regions in 2006-07 will be as given in the table below. Payments for travel from other regions will be established as necessary. Payments will be revised as appropriate in later years.

Sydney region	car	\$200
Canberra region	car	\$240
Brisbane region	car	\$280
Melbourne region	car	\$400
Hobart region	plane & car	\$900
Adelaide region	plane & car	\$900
Perth region	plane & car	\$1,500

- [4] *Accommodation support:* For each run (or effective run, see [2]), accommodation support will be provided in the form of payment for SSO Lodge bed & board costs for up to the number of nights equal to the number of nights in the run plus one (to allow observers to arrive by the night before the night their run begins). Payment will only be made up to this maximum for nights actually spent at the Lodge.
- [5] *Payment process:* Observers are responsible for paying all their expenses at the time they are incurred; T&A payments can only be claimed after the run is complete and after observers' Lodge bills are paid. To claim T&A payments, observers must submit a T&A Claim Form (available from <http://www.aao.gov.au/astro/austa.html>) together with a copy of their Lodge payment receipt to the AAO, within 6 months of the completion of their observing run. Claims may be made by observers separately or together, at their discretion (noting rule [3] regarding car travel for two observers from the same institution).
- [6] *Auditing and penalties:* In claiming T&A, observers give the AAO the right to audit their claims. Significant irregularities in T&A claims may, at the discretion of the Director, result in ineligibility for future T&A support.